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Sustainable development: follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Joint Inspection Unit

Comprehensive review of United Nations system support for small island developing States: initial findings

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Comprehensive review of United Nations system support for small island developing States: initial findings" (see A/71/324).

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Comprehensive review of United Nations system support for small island developing States: initial findings" (see A/71/324) was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 69/288, which requested the Joint Inspection Unit to prepare a comprehensive review of United Nations system support to small island developing States on the basis of an earlier document of the Unit outlining the parameters for such a comprehensive review. The present report presents the initial findings of the Unit on that topic, with a more comprehensive report to follow. In accordance with the mandate provided by the Assembly, the report first assesses the United Nations Headquarters support to small island developing States, in particular the linkage between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The assessment is followed by an analysis of the United Nations entities that are mandated to provide support to small island developing States and an assessment of the role and functioning of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on Small Island Developing States.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Comprehensive review of United Nations system support for small island developing States: initial findings" (see A/71/324) was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 69/288, which requested the Unit to prepare a comprehensive review of United Nations system support to small island developing States on the basis of an earlier document of the Unit outlining the parameters for such a comprehensive review. The present report presents the initial findings of the Unit on that topic, with a more comprehensive report to follow. In accordance with the mandate provided by the Assembly, the report first assesses the United Nations Headquarters support to small island developing States, in particular the linkage between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The assessment is followed by an analysis of the United Nations entities that are mandated to provide support to small island developing States and an assessment of the role and functioning of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on Small Island Developing States.

II. General comments

2. Organizations of the United Nations system took note of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Comprehensive review of United Nations system support for small island developing States: initial findings", observing that, as mandated by General Assembly resolution 69/288, the present review was limited to consideration of the work of the United Nations Secretariat and agencies under the its strategic framework, and to the work and functioning of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group, and therefore was provided to most United Nations entities for information only. A more comprehensive analysis of system-wide coherence and linkages among the global mandates of the United Nations and the role of United Nations system entities involved in providing support to the small island developing States agenda will be addressed in a subsequent report.

3. Accordingly, it was noted by some organizations that the current review omits key support activities by funds and programmes, although such programmes provide a substantial portion of the support to small island developing States by the United Nations system. United Nations system entities, therefore, look forward to a more complete analysis that provides information on the full spectrum of support provided by the United Nations system to small island developing States. Organizations also look forward to the opportunity to provide additional substantive inputs to the supplementary review.

4. With regard to the recommendations, organizations were generally supportive, and some welcomed the call for more coherence between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative, as well as defined terms of reference for the Inter-Agency Consultative Group.

5. It was observed that the summary of chapter II of the report noted that, during the biennium 2014-2015, each Small Island Developing States Unit "benefitted from one additional temporary P-3 post each, currently discontinued". It should be noted

that the Office of the High Representative was provided with resources (non-recurrent provisions under other staff costs, consultants and contractual services) in the context of preparations for the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. Some of those resources were converted into a temporary P-3 position during the biennium 2014-2015. Those resources, and therefore the P-3 position, were discontinued for the biennium 2016-2017.

6. A need for clarification was also noted for paragraph 16, regarding the role of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and in particular the statement that the Department, "with few resources, was expanding work in the field", and that "given the constraints, priority should be given to its normative mandate and advocacy in intergovernmental processes" to support small island developing States. In response, it was noted that the Small Island Developing States Unit currently has one development account project on measuring vulnerability and resilience in small island developing States. That could create the impression of limited resources. The Department does not carry out traditional technical cooperation in the field, which is the mandate of field-based agencies. However, the Department has mandates for capacity-building in support of small island developing States in the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through the Department's regular programme of technical cooperation and its development account resources. The Department offers such support at the request of small island developing States and in collaboration with the United Nations development system. Further, the Department disagrees with the statement above, as it has mandates for normative, analytical and capacity-building activities. Indeed, its unique strength and comparative advantage lies in the connections among its normative, analytical and capacity-building work.

7. Finally, clarifying the statement in paragraph 28 regarding an increase in the budget between the 2010-2011 biennium and the 2014-2015 biennium, it should be noted that the large extrabudgetary fund was earmarked for preparations for the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Secretary-General should ensure that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States establish a joint system to plan, monitor and report on their activities, including reference to resources allocation in relation to their respective mandates, measured against expected results in line with the results-based principles in General Assembly resolution 70/8 on programme planning, and that the information is made available to Member States and United Nations system partners supporting small island developing States.

8. While supporting the recommendation, and noting that the sharing of information on joint planning, monitoring and reporting of activities and expected results will yield benefits by facilitating synergies and complementarities, it was noted that the small island developing States programmes in the Department of

Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative are prepared and reported under different sections of the Secretariat's biennial programme plan and biennial programme budget. The plan and budget are prepared in accordance with the terms specified within a bulletin of the Secretary-General.[1] Requesting the Secretary-General to establish a separate system would have implications for the structure and preparation of the Secretariat's programme budget. In addition, it was expressed that the phrase "a joint system to plan, monitor and report on their activities" lacked clarity, especially regarding subprogrammes of the Secretariat that are prepared and reported under different sections. It was suggested that coherence and coordination could be pursued through the Committee for Programme and Coordination, which has the responsibility of reviewing the strategic framework of the two subprogrammes and the biennial programme performance report.

Recommendation 2

The General Assembly, based on a transparent and clearly substantiated needs assessment prepared by the United Nations Secretariat, should consider the needs resulting from the evolving mandates given to the Secretariat's programmes and subprogrammes and ensure the allocation of resources required to adequately respond to the mandates in support of the sustainable development agenda of small island developing States.

9. Noting that the recommendation was directed to the General Assembly, organizations supported the recommendation. It was noted that fulfilling the recommendation might benefit all United Nations system agencies engaged in providing support to small island developing States.

Recommendation 3

The Secretary-General should ensure that the report on "Follow-up to and implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Mauritius Strategy for Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Small Island Developing States" builds upon the work of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on Small Island Developing States, adequately reflecting the support provided by the entire United Nations system, and includes a section on the collaboration between the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as well as a section on the strategy and vision to foster sustainable development of small island developing States, so as to provide Member States with a strategic document to monitor and assess progress made and gaps to be addressed as priorities for a more effective implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Organizations supported recommendation 3.

[1] Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8).

Recommendation 4

The Secretary-General should ensure that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, in close consultation with all United Nations system entities supporting the small island developing States agenda and members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on Small Island Developing States, undertake a reform of the Group to clarify its role, programme of work, criteria for membership and outreach to stakeholders.

11. Organizations supported recommendation 4, with some organizations expressing a willingness to participate in the consultations with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative to support the process of reform of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group and to provide their contributions at each stage of the process as required.

12. In that context, and in reference to paragraph 186 of the report, in particular the statement regarding the Inspectors' view that, since the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of the High Representative both had core mandates on small island developing States within the United Nations and that, in the context of strengthening their coordination they should clarify responsibilities in the preparation of Inter-Agency Consultative Group's programme of work and in the management of the Group, one organization noted that the Office and the Department now alternately co-chair the Group, which includes collaborating on setting the agenda for each Group meeting, and that a recent meeting had been chaired by the Office.